



Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division

2009 RUFFED GROUSE AND AMERICAN WOODCOCK COOPERATORS EARLY SEASON REPORT

Early season reports from ruffed grouse and American woodcock cooperators allow biologists to quickly assess hunter success and local field conditions across the state of Michigan at the beginning of the grouse season. This report is a summary of their responses for September 15-18, 2009.

Cooperators returned 81 useable surveys. They hunted 468 hours in 45 counties during the survey period. Respondents hunted most in Zone 2, followed by Zone 1, and Zone 3. Hunters reported the highest average flush rates for grouse in Zones 2 and 1, respectively (Table 1). Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for grouse were Grand Traverse, Benzie, Kalkaska, Wexford, and Oscoda. Although the woodcock season was not open during the survey period, cooperators were asked to also count woodcock flushes. Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for woodcock were Gladwin, Roscommon, Kalkaska, Grand Traverse, and Wexford.

About 33% of the respondents thought grouse populations were up or slightly up from last year in the areas they hunted, with 34% reporting populations about the same as the previous year and 33% describing them as down or slightly down (Table 2). About 18% of the respondents thought woodcock populations were up or slightly up from last year while about 36% thought they were the same as last year and 46% thought they were down or slightly down (Table 2).

Ruffed grouse have approximately ten-year cycles in abundance over much of Canada, Alaska, and the Great Lakes states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan (Rusch et al. 1999). Over the years, many theories have been proposed to explain these cycles including diseases, weather, forest fires, sunspots, starvation, crowding, predators, genetic changes, and chance (Rusch 1989). It appears that we may be approaching the peak in the grouse population cycle (Figure 1). However, hunters should note that increased or decreased abundance of animals at a regional scale does not ensure the same trend locally. The best grouse and woodcock hunting opportunities will continue to be in areas of young early forest successional habitat.

Many hunters commented on the warm and dry weather conditions for the opening of the grouse season. Hunters also commented on good food availability for grouse. Some hunters said that they would prefer that grouse season open later in the season when there is less foliage.

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Literature Cited

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Table 1. Ruffed grouse and American woodcock flush rates reported by zone and year for September 15-18.

Zone	2008			2009		
	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour
1	139.3	2.3	0.5	99.4	1.6	0.2
2	315.9	2.4	1.0	329.9	2.1	1.1
3	37.5	0.9	1.3	33.1	0.7	0.5
State	492.6	2.3	0.9	468.4	1.9	0.9

Table 2. Hunter opinions about ruffed grouse and American woodcock populations.

Trend	Ruffed grouse		Woodcock	
	2008	2009	2008	2009
Up	14%	14%	4%	7%
Slightly Up	29%	19%	25%	11%
Same	32%	34%	32%	36%
Slightly Down	10%	13%	22%	14%
Down	13%	20%	16%	32%

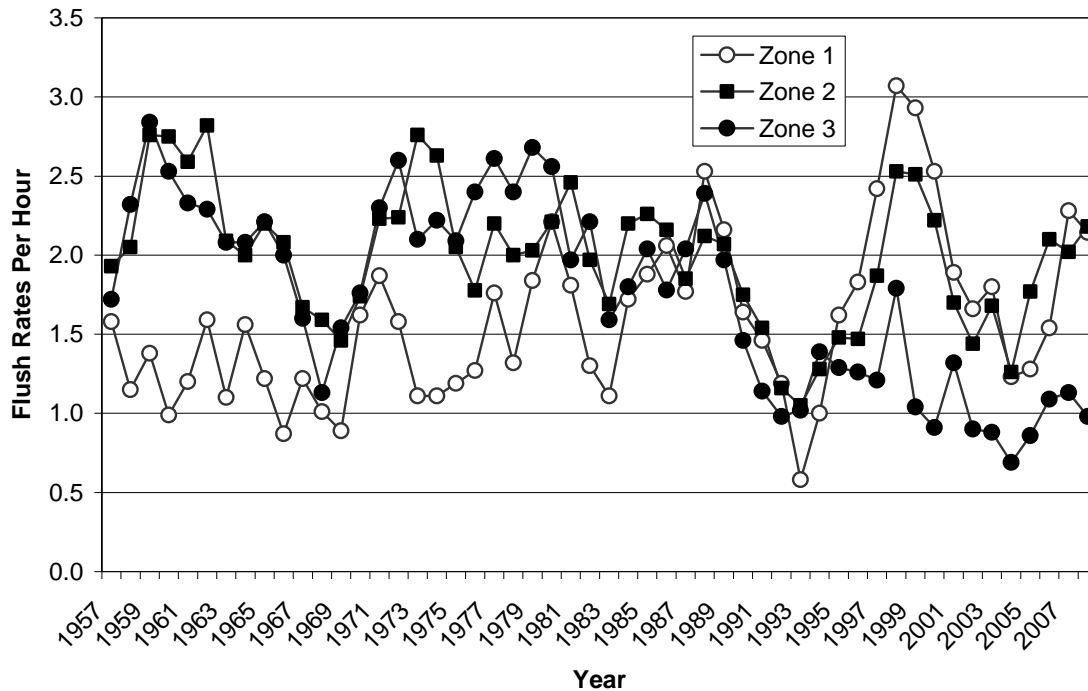


Figure 1. Ruffed grouse flush rates as reported by cooperating hunters, 1957-2008. This figure shows a summary of the data collected during the entire grouse hunting season. Data for 2009 will be added after the end of the season.